

To: R2 EPA Region 2 (EPA Staff)[R2_EPA_Region_2_EPA_Staff@epa.gov]
From: Shore, Berry
Sent: Fri 3/4/2016 1:23:03 PM
Subject: Clips: Ithaca Schools Lead in Drinking Water and Hoosick Falls Issues

10 Ithaca schools fail lead tests; results questioned

March 3, 2016

Ithaca Journal

Lead levels have tested too high again in drinking water at 10 schools in the Ithaca City School District, but the Tompkins County Health Department has questioned the validity of the results.

The district released new testing data Thursday, along with two letters that questioned the data.

"Recent sampling procedures may have produced inaccurate results," Ithaca City School District Superintendent Luvelle Brown wrote in a letter released Thursday. The letter appears on the school district's website.

Brown did not respond to multiple requests for comment from The Ithaca Journal on Wednesday and Thursday.

TST BOCES shut off the valve at each fixture the night before sampling water from the 10 schools, which breaks Environmental Protection Agency guidance for testing, Tompkins County Environmental Health Director Elizabeth Cameron wrote in another letter.

The health department consulted the New York State Department of Health about the sampling inconsistency.

"Because of concerns with these improper sampling procedures, the results may not be representative of actual conditions and may have produced inaccurate results," Cameron wrote.

Among some of the highest results: A drinking fountain in room 217 at Northeast Elementary had lead at 265 parts per billion, and a fountain in the Rainbow Room at Belle Sherman Annex had lead at 470 ppb. The EPA standard for lead is 15 ppb.

"A plan is being developed to retest all other buildings," Brown wrote in the letter. "Along with proper testing practices, investigation must be conducted to determine whether any remediation efforts are needed to produce compliant and safe water systems throughout

our school district."

The school district is working with EPA Region 2 Administrator Judith Enck on sampling procedures, remediation efforts, and potential funding sources, he added. A third-party project leader will coordinate the EPA collaboration, water systems' evaluations and action steps, Brown wrote.

"I appreciate our school community's engagement and support as we address the very important and complex issue of water quality," Brown's letter stated.

EPA will assist Ithaca schools with lead in water probe

by Andrew Casler, AndrewCasler

3:11 p.m. EST March 3, 2016

Ithaca Journal

On Feb. 23, the Ithaca school district released new results showing huge exceedances in lead concentrations at Caroline and Enfield elementary schools. Testing showed the highest lead concentration, 5,000 parts per billion, in a bathroom sink in a music room at Caroline Elementary School. That level of lead in water exceeds the EPA's criteria for toxic waste

EPA experts are planning to assist the Ithaca City School District in response to test results that showed excessive lead levels in tap water at Caroline and Enfield elementary schools.

Test results showing too-high lead levels in drinking water at Caroline and Enfield ignited concerns about children drinking contaminated water in Tompkins County.

U.S. Sen Charles Schumer, D-New York, announced the EPA plans in a news release Thursday afternoon. Schumer called for the EPA to assist the Tompkins County schools last week.

"I am pleased the EPA has heeded our call and agreed to help the Ithaca community by providing lead experts to assist the Ithaca School District," Schumer said in a news release.

He added: "By having this technical expertise collaborating with local officials on the ground, and all hands on deck, we can better identify the source and extent of this contamination – so we can quickly develop a plan and prevent any future contamination. We must make sure Ithaca school children and the workers are safe and this situation remediated as soon as possible."

A new round of water sampling at Caroline and Enfield elementary schools is expected to begin before the end of next week, Tompkins County Health Department Director Frank Kruppa said Tuesday.

The health department and the Ithaca City School District are developing a water sampling methodology that aims to determine the cause of high lead levels at the two schools, Kruppa said.

According to the National Institutes of Health, lead is much more harmful to children than adults because it can affect children's developing nerves and brains.

Schumer said exceedances for lead in tap water are particularly concerning within a school system, and that underscores the need for EPA assistance. Children 6 years old and younger are most susceptible to the effects of lead, which can affect almost every organ and system in a person's body, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Lead poisoning damages growing cells and tissues, and it can cause behavior and learning problems, lower IQ, slowed growth, hearing problems and anemia.

On Feb. 24, the Ithaca City School District released data from 2005 showing that drinking water throughout the school district could have exceeded EPA limits for lead during the past 11 years.

In interviews last week, Kruppa and Ithaca school district Superintendent Luvelle Brown said the source of lead in drinking water at schools hadn't yet been confirmed.

The EPA's technical expertise and experience in dealing with lead contamination will better provide needed support to the school district and could better help the community understand the full scope of water contamination, Schumer said in a letter to EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy.

Once this contamination is better understood, through testing, the subsequent remediation can commence as quickly as possible, the senator added.

"Protecting the health of our children and school employees and ensuring the water they drink while attending school is safe is of the utmost importance," Schumer wrote. "Considering the high number of water sources that tested above the recommended levels for lead, I urge you to send resources quickly to help the community investigate and come up with solutions to solve this problem."

Ithaca City School District first notified parents of the excessive lead levels Feb. 2, which was six months after samples showed lead concentrations in the elementary schools' tap water exceeded the Environmental Protection Agency standard of 15 parts per billion.

Water was retested in January, showing lower lead concentrations, but three samples were still at or higher than the federal allowance for lead in water.

On Feb. 23, the Ithaca school district released new results showing huge exceedances in lead concentrations for the two elementary schools.

Testing showed the highest lead concentration, 5,000 parts per billion, in a bathroom sink in a music room at Caroline Elementary School. That level of lead in water exceeds the EPA's criteria for toxic waste.

Water will be tested first without flushing water pipes, and then it will be tested after the pipes are flushed, according to Kruppa. The sampling method could determine if flushing the system would get the schools to acceptable concentrations for lead, he said.

"We don't just want (testing) results; we're also trying to find out ways that we can get the system within compliance," Kruppa said.

The EPA is aware that some sampling instructions recommend flushing the tap before starting a minimum six-hour stagnation time, which is required for samples collected under the Lead and Copper Rule, according to agency spokeswoman Mary Mears.

Flushing pipes is a common method that may lower lead concentrations, she added.

"While flushing taps before use is an important practice consumers can take to limit exposure from lead in drinking water, it is not a recommended practice for tap sample collection," a Feb. 29 EPA memorandum states.

Schumer's letter:

Dear Administrator McCarthy:

Following the recent discovery of unacceptably high levels of lead in the drinking water of several of its schools, I write to urge the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to use its technical expertise to quickly assist the community of Ithaca, New York in testing their water for lead contamination. I also urge the EPA to assist Ithaca in defining the scope and source of this lead contamination, and to help them devise a plan to eradicate it.

In light of recent news that the community has found elevated levels of lead in more than 50 samples taken at the Caroline Elementary School and 11 samples taken at the Enfield Elementary School, it is critical that the EPA use their experience and resources to expeditiously help the community test all of the water in order to help identify the extent of the contamination and track its source.

As you know, elevated levels of lead in drinking water can have a detrimental effect on

the health of the community, and especially on children who are more vulnerable to the damaging impacts of lead poisoning. Recently, the Ithaca City School District reported that there were more than 60 samples that tested above the EPA recommended lead levels of 15 parts per billion (PPB) during their contracted water testing which was completed in August of 2015.

This high level of contamination must be remediated as soon as possible in order to ensure the health and safety of our children, teachers and all in the school community. With the EPA's technical expertise and experience in dealing with lead contamination – and in particular, lead contamination in school – I request that you immediately provide technical support to help the community investigate the full scope of the problem and assist with subsequent remediation as quickly as possible.

Protecting the health of our children and school employees and ensuring the water they drink while attending school is safe is of the utmost importance. Considering the high number of water sources that tested above the recommended levels for lead, I urge you to send resources quickly to help the community investigate and come up with solutions to solve this problem.

Again, I thank you for your work in protecting our nation's health and the quality of our drinking water. Thank you for your attention to this important request.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Schumer

United States Senator

EPA experts to assist Ithaca City School District with lead problem

By WBNG Binghamton

Updated Mar 3, 2016 at 6:39 PM EST

(WBNG Binghamton) U.S. Senator Charles Schumer on Thursday announced the U.S. Department of Environmental Protection (EPA) will immediately have lead experts assist the City of Ithaca, where two schools were found to have high levels of lead in the water.

Elevated levels of lead were recently found in more than 50 samples taken at the

Caroline Elementary School, and in 11 samples taken at the Enfield Elementary School. As a result, water has been shut off to the two schools and students are being forced to use bottled water.

In a news release, Schumer said these sources of water – which are serviced by wells, rather than municipal water sources – should be immediately tested with the assistance of the EPA to see where the problem exists and how it can be mitigated. Schumer has urged the EPA to provide its lead experts to Ithaca, citing that the EPA could use their technical expertise to work hand-in-hand with the school district and the community of Ithaca in any way it can.

“I am pleased the EPA has heeded our call and agreed to help the Ithaca community by providing lead experts to assist the Ithaca School District. By having this technical expertise collaborating with local officials on the ground, and all hands on deck, we can better identify the source and extent of this contamination – so we can quickly develop a plan and prevent any future contamination. We must make sure Ithaca school children and the workers are safe and this situation remediated as soon as possible,” said Schumer (D).

Schumer explained that these two schools just outside the City of Ithaca in Tompkins County – which are serviced by privately owned wells – were found to have more than 60 samples where lead-water levels were found to be over 15 parts per billion (PPB), which is considered to be actionable by the federal EPA. Schumer said, for this reason, it is critical that the EPA use its experience and resources to expeditiously help the community test all of the water. Schumer said doing so would help the Ithaca City School District identify the extent of the contamination and track its source, whether that is contaminated water, pipes or other sources.

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), lead is much more harmful to children than adults because it can affect children’s developing nerves and brains. Schumer said that is why it is particularly concerning this lead-water issue is occurring within a school system, and underscores the need for the EPA to lend its expertise wherever it can.

According to the National Center for Healthy Housing, childhood exposure to lead has lifelong consequences, including decreased IQ and cognitive function, developmental

delays and behavioral problems. Very high levels of lead exposure can cause seizures, coma and even death. Some health organizations, like the National Center for Environmental Health in a 2012 study, argue that no safe blood-lead threshold in children has yet been identified.

Schumer said that the EPA's technical expertise and experience in dealing with lead contamination will better provide needed support to the school district and could better help the community understand the full scope of water contamination.

Once the contamination is better understood, through testing, the subsequent remediation can commence as quickly as possible, Schumer said.

10 Ithaca schools test positive for lead; district questions results

by Michael Smith

March 3, 2016

Ithaca Voice

ITHACA, NY - The results of more lead testing in Ithaca district schools have turned up positive results. Meanwhile, the school district and Tompkins Health Department are calling some previous results into question.

On Thursday, ICSD posted the results of lead testing performed on 10 different schools in the district: Northeast Elementary, Fall Creek Elementary, DeWitt Middle School, South Hill, Lehman Alternative, Ithaca High School, Belle Sherman and its annex, Beverly J. Martin Elementary, Boynton Middle School and Cayuga Heights.

Five water samples were taken from each school, except for Belle Sherman which had five samples from its annex and three from the school.

28 samples out of the 53 tested returned results above the 15 parts per billion (ppb) action level recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency. 11 of those results were over 100 ppb, with some being 400 ppb or higher.

Under EPA policy, action is required if the 90th percentile of the samples tested exceed the 15 ppb action level. This was the case for every school on the list.

Some samples also tested positive for copper contamination, though only in Boynton and South Hill did the 90th percentile value exceed the action level.

Improper testing?

However, the Tompkins County Health Department and, by extension, the school district, are questioning the validity of some previous testing results from Caroline school -- which had one faucet that report toxic waste levels of lead contamination.

A letter from Elizabeth Cameron, Director of Environment Health, expresses concern over the way the testing was handled.

In her letter, Cameron notes that the testers shut off the water system in Caroline the night before the test. She calls this is a "significant departure" from the usual testing procedures. She also notes that there was a leak in the Caroline water system that may have depressurized the system.

The same testing procedures were also used in Enfield.

"Both shutting off the water system and the reported depressurizing of the Caroline Elementary School water system may have created disruptive, turbulent or scouring conditions in the water pipes, potentially releasing lead-containing particles into the distribution system," Cameron said.

Cameron says that after consulting with the New York State Department of Health, the Tompkins Health Department is concerned that the results "may not be representative of actual conditions."

In a separate letter, ICSD Superintendent Dr. Luvelle Brown echoed that idea, adding, "The Tompkins County Health Department has advised that we retest at Caroline and Enfield elementary the week of March 7. A plan is being developed to retest all other buildings."

"Along with proper testing practices, investigation must be conducted to determine whether any remediation efforts are needed to produce compliant and safe water systems throughout our school district," writes Brown.

Brown also wrote that the district has been in contact with EPA officials. Senator Chuck Schumer announced on Thursday that the EPA had agreed to aid ICSD with the lead issue.

People in Hoosick Falls can now receive premixed formula for their infants

By Lindsay Nielsen

Published: March 3, 2016, 2:44 pm | Updated: March 3, 2016, 6:46 pm

NEWS10 ABC

HOOSICK FALLS, N.Y. (NEWS10) – People in Hoosick Falls are now able to receive premixed formula for infants due to the water contamination issue in the village.

Tops Market, where people have been going for months to get bottled water, is now selling a special, premixed formula through the WIC program.

The formula is already mixed with water so people don't have to use their five gallon daily amount of bottled water on formula.

Angela Wason first informed people of the premade formula on a Facebook page called PFOA in Hoosick Falls, which was created by people in Hoosick Falls dedicated to notifying the community.

Wason is a member of the Water Angels, a volunteer group that delivers bottled water to those who aren't able to get their own.

"They only allow certain kinds of formula, and as of yesterday, they came over to Tops and spoke with the managers over here, and they have approved to sell the premixed formula," Wason said. "I believe it's quite costly, and that's why they don't approve it to begin with."

Harold Lessman lives in Hoosick Falls with his wife and their 4-day-old son, Steven.

"I don't know, and I want a straight answer from somebody," Lessman said. "What can I do about medical defects? Are there any?"

Lessman doesn't know if PFOA has also harmed his son.

lessman baby hoosick falls

"This is my only biological son I have," he said. "If anything happens to him, I don't know what I'm going to do."

Lessman rents an apartment in the village. He said he didn't know about the water issue until December 2015.

“My wife’s been cooking with it, eating with it, washing laundry with it, making coffee with it the whole entire pregnancy,” he said.

A science panel determined there is a probable link between PFOA and certain types of cancer as well as thyroid disease and other illnesses. Lessman said his wife has been sick, and now he fears the worst for his son.

“I called the health department, [and they said], ‘Oh, we don’t know, yet,’” he said. “The mayor’s not giving me a straight answer. The EPA’s not giving me a straight answer. No one’s giving me a straight answer. What should I look for?”

But Wason is one person brightening the Lessman family’s day.

“I thank God for the water angels,” he said.

Wason delivered good news to Lessman on Thursday.

“I just found out through her just today about WIC being approved for the liquid, so we thank God for that now because it’s too much right now on us day in and day out,” Lessman said. “What are we going to do with WIC? How are we going to get the formula made?”

WIC also said it has been reaching out to families in Hoosick Falls to let them know about the premixed formula.

Hoosick Falls residents told to continue flushing pipes

By WNYT Staff

Updated: 03/03/2016 12:50 PM

Channel 13 News

HOOSICK FALLS - People living in Hoosick Falls are being told to keep flushing the pipes in their homes.

A new filtration system for the village has been installed, but the water won't be safe until PFOA is flushed out of the pipes.

Samples that were taken before filtration began show around 1,000 parts per trillion of the chemical linked to cancer.

The health department has informed the mayor that spike could be the result of heavy rainfall. New readings on samples will be taken once filtration takes hold.

Some Hoosick Falls residents fear real estate market has collapsed

By Hubert Wiggins

Thursday, March 3rd 2016

6 News WRGB Albany

HOOSICK FALLS -- Musician George Villarini has lived in Hoosick Falls for more than 30 years. A recent string of health ailments forced George to retire. He and his wife are thinking about moving south to be near their daughter.

"Because of my medical condition I've recently retired and spent some time with my daughter in Georgia. My wife and I talked about selling the house and moving to Georgia but that's not going to happen, not in the near future," Mr. Villarini said.

Villarini recently sought advice from the Department of Financial Services. The agency has set up a mobile command center near the intersection of Elm and Church. Experts are meeting with residents three times a week. Villarini spoke with them several weeks ago.

"I just wanted to find out what my options were and my options are really limited right now until more investigation happens," Mr. Villarini said.

Hoosick Falls resident Bryan Hassenpflug is approaching retirement. The mortgage on his house will be paid off in a couple of years. His children are urging Hassenpflug and his wife to sell the house and downsize. Hassenpflug also sought advice from the Department of Financial Services.

"The only thing they told us was just stay there and see what happens; they keep saying once the water situation gets straightened out, everything will be fine, but that's not what we're hearing from other towns that have had similar problems," Mr. Hassenpflug said.

Read: Latest PFOA tests from Hoosick Falls

By Casey Seiler, Capitol bureau chief

March 3, 2016 at 10:54 AM

Albany Times

Thursday's Times Union includes our summary of the state Department of Health's recent round of 145 water well tests from the Village of Hoosick Falls and the Town of Hoosick.

The testing for perfluorooctanoic acid or PFOA was conducted by DOH between Jan. 27 and Feb. 25 on public and private wells. The results were posted this week on the village website.

PFOA, used in the production of non-stick surfaces, has been linked to numerous human maladies, including several forms of cancer. In January 2009, the EPA set its advisory for short-term exposure to PFOA at no more than 400 parts per trillion. Last month, the agency set a limit of 100 ppt that applies to regular residential water use.

The most recent DOH water tests showed 42 locations with PFOA levels at or above 100 ppt. Twenty-two of those sites showed results higher than 400 ppt. Seven sites showed results above 800 ppt: four were listed as part of the village's water distribution system, the other three as private residential wells — including one with a PFOA level of 3010 ppt.

No locations are given, though DOH spokesman Jim Plastiras said the agency was working up a map while trying to address issues of residents' privacy. The DEC's map showing areas of PFOA contamination was included in its letter last month to Saint-Gobain and Honeywell, which that agency's preliminary investigation identified as the most likely responsible parties.
